

Corvi Chronicle

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RAZZLE dazzling

Through the years the Chronicle has often published accounts of individuals successfully raising foundling crows. In the hand feeding process these young birds are unavoidably imprinted on those who do the feeding and often on people in general. When able to fly and released to do so freely (as they all should be) these imprinted birds hang out with their human foster parents for several months – instructing, charming and aggravating them. However, as the summer wears on, the imprinting weakens and these birds absent themselves for longer and longer periods of time; begin making or at least attempting to form relationships with wild crows. Then in the fall or early winter they disappear. Such data as exists indicates the survival rate of once imprinted birds is very low. No matter how caring and competent, people cannot teach crows many of the things they apparently need to know. Also



Razzle

imprinted crows are apt to be insufficiently wary of people and encounter some who are insufficiently appreciative of them.

However there are rare exceptions to this pattern. Perhaps the rarest has been reported by #563 who with her husband resides in a rural area of Oregon. There on a spring mushroom hunt 563 and her companion dogs came upon a very young crow huddled on the ground, wet and cold, apparently in *extremis*. However, having experience as an avian rehabilitator, 563 took the foundling home and was able to save the bird which she named Razzle, and assumed – incorrectly as we shall shortly see to be a male.

THE FIRST RARE THING

After Razzle became able to do so the crow was of course given liberty to fly in and out of the house and wherever she pleased outside. However for the past five years Razzle has remained on the premises with the 563s. In the vicinity are several crow families (among them presumably are the bird's biological parents) and Razzle sometimes associates with them amicably, so it seems. On a



very few occasions Razzle has disappeared for two or three days, going off either with the wild crows or on its own private missions. However, most usually, Razzle roosts each night in the 563s' bedroom, entering before dusk either through a door or an open window.

THE SECOND, EVEN RARER THING

After the second year Razzle began to display behavior that indicated the crow regarded 563 as its mate. Then, to quote directly from 563's report:

"As the third spring approached Razzle could be seen occasionally carrying around sticks. At this point we still didn't know the gender of the bird and seeing how both male and female are involved in the nest building process, we remained clueless. One day I went into my closet for a clothing item and Razzle followed me in and began rear-

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WHO'S HOOTING NOW: Owls, crows and crows

Though they may demonstrate a crude sort of cleverness when advancing their own interests, owls are not the brightest of ornithological lights. They are as a rule grumpy, xenophobic predators who keep to themselves and are territorial possessive but not particularly adaptive. They do not form lasting bonds with offspring

or siblings and otherwise their relations (except for basic reproductive ones) with others of their own kind are minimal. With them it is every owl for him or herself and the Devil take the hindmost. In regards other kinds, owls ignore, avoid or attempt to eat them.

Nevertheless in very early times many people and – as we have recently learned

– crows believed that owls were exceptionally wise. (this is paradoxical since those two species are much more generously endowed with native intelligence than are owls.) This ridiculous belief seems to have been based on appearance rather than performance. When others were up and around, busying themselves during the day, owls sat in

dimly lit bowers fluffing out their feathers, looking solemn and pontifical when in fact they were only mindlessly digesting mice or the occasional crow. Also, being vocally challenged, owls frequently hooted. Generally these hoots were meaningless but they often sounded to the gullible as if they might

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RAZZLE DAZZLING *continued*: 'He' builds a nest

ranging folded clothes on a top shelf. There happened to be one of his sticks on the floor just outside of the closet, which he promptly retrieved and placed on the top shelf. Well the placement of that one stick opened the flood gates and the building of his first nest had commenced. Over the next two weeks each morning he would fly out, procure a suitable stick, fly to the front porch and sit in front of the window, stick in beak, waiting for either my husband or I to open the door allowing him to enter. He would walk through the open door and across the floor to the stairwell. He would then hop up all 12 stairs and from there to the banister and then fly into the closet to the top shelf. This routine would go on for two or three hours each morning. My husband and I had been relegated to be the official doorman for a crow. After about a week of our serving this bird I decided to open the bedroom window so Razzle could come and go as he collected his sticks. If this wasn't time consuming enough, things became worse when it came time to collect the nest lining materials. Razzle's preferred nest lining was toilet paper. He would go



into the bathroom, jump up onto the toilet paper roll and begin running on the roll causing the paper to unfurl and pile up on the floor. The bird looked like one of those lumber jacks running on a floating log. Once he had enough paper piled up, he would fly to the floor and rip off just the right amount to suit his needs. Socks and shoelaces were also used in this nest as were copious amounts of my kitchen twine used for cooking. The finishing touches for the nest lining came from our yard fence. The bird favored thin strips of bark that he would peel off the fence and weave into the stick frame of the nest.

Eventually Razzle laid his first egg

and all doubts of his gender were put to rest. However, after three years of calling Razzle "him," my husband and I decided not to change our verbiage. We're too old for that kind of change and besides I didn't want to confuse Razzle by calling him "her." So to this day we continue to use the male gender terminology. Within a few hours of Razzle laying his first egg in the nest, he relocated this egg to the window sill of his open bedroom window. When I discovered the egg I immediately returned it to the nest but unfortunately he once again returned it to the window sill. He laid six eggs all of which ended up on the window sill or on the ground outside. He never did go through an incubation period during this first nesting season."

THE THIRD AND RAREST THING OF ALL

This past (2010) spring Razzle made a nest on the bedroom platform and hatched two eggs. Thereafter – and again to quote 563:

Our bedroom and the area just outside of the open window is now a "NO FLY ZONE" directed towards Jack, my dogs

Continued on next page

WHO'S HOOTING *continued* Traditional vs socialist behaviors

be cryptic, cynical responses which are often confused by the gullible with wisdom.

Long, long ago when things were easy and warm it seems that crows, attempting to emulate the pseudo-sagacious owls lived as solitary anti-social omnivores. But then it became much colder and harsher. Owls considered this to be only a temporary meteorological adjustment and that changing their habits in response would be unowlish. So they hunkered down in their private properties, fluffed out their feathers, looked solemn, toughed it out and hooted at those who responded differently.

In contrast the hard times stimulated crows to make use of their native intelligence. They formed extended family units in which adults of both sexes helped to rear and educate the young. Foraging flocks collectively located and shared food sources. In winter months hundreds, often thousands, of crows gathered to spend nights together in communal roosts. In them, perched cheek by jowl, individuals were warmer and safer (especially from owls) than they would have been alone. The winter congregations promoted gregarious relationships and perhaps later, in season, sexual ones.

However for some crows the New Behaviors were an outrageous mockery of old ways and verities. These traditionalists went, cautiously, to wise owls to seek, from a safe distance, sympathy and advice. The owls hooted that whatever they might be euphemistically called, Nuclear Families, Collective Foraging and Communal Roosting were clearly fomented by Socialists. These practices would inevitably corrode character, erode personal freedoms and create pandemics of laziness. The only principled defense was to adhere to traditional values no matter what the temporal cost.

Some crows (who came to be called Crows) heeded this advice but they soon disappeared, becoming extinct because of declining reproductive rates and malnutrition. Also many of them were picked off by owls.

As for owls, to give them their due, their behavior and what might be called – if they had one – world view hasn't changed much. On the other hand while crows are now one of the most successful Invigorated species, a fair number of the remaining owls are on Rare and Endangered lists. And so far as wisdom goes they no longer have much of a reputation.

Razzle roosted each night in the 563s' bedroom, entering before dusk either through a door or an open window.

At right: Razzle enters house with beak full of dried grass for nest site she selected on a bedroom closet shelf.

Below, far right: she arranges and weaves nest materials: sticks and grass lined with toilet paper, socks, shoelaces, kitchen twine and fencepost bark
Center: a clutch of Razzle's eggs.



and anything that flies by. Razzle has drawn Jack's blood several times this season and Jack must wear a hat at all times because he never knows when an attack will be launched. I must commend my husband on his ability not to take the attacks

personally as he realizes it's the hormones that are in the driver's seat. After all it's been a drastic change for Jack going from a practicing neurosurgeon to retirement and then to a lowly crow sitter for Razzle. I think he's handled the adjustment well considering all things.

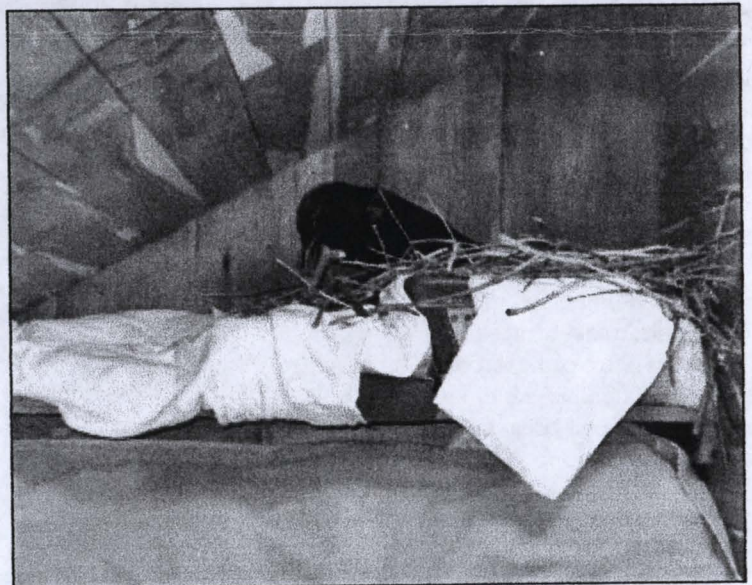
(Jack 563 is thought to be the front-runner in this year's competition for the prestigious Good Mate Award, presented annually by the ASCAR Board of Directors.)

As for 563 herself. She assisted Razzle to the extent she could as wild crow mates and helper birds do – with rearing the nestlings. To ease Razzle's foraging work, 563 daily put out a nutritious buffet near the open window. Also, thinking the bed-



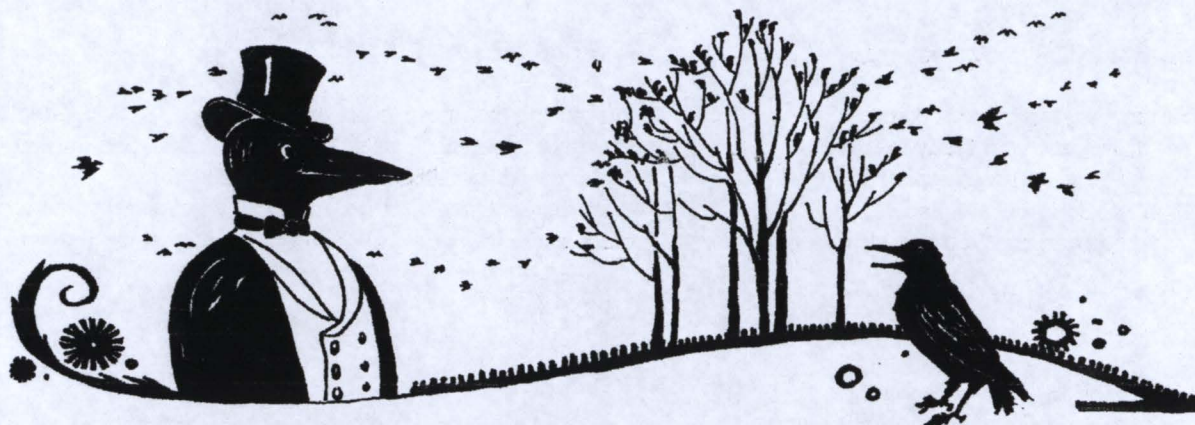
room platform a bit gloomy, 563 took each of the nestlings (separately) outside each day to benefit from fresh air and sunshine.

However, after the young birds began going outside on their own, flying awkwardly about the place, and perching in trees, 563 could obviously not do much to help them. In practical terms Razzle became a single parent so far as their feeding and protection was concerned. This may well account for the sad fact that both bedroom hatched crows came to bad, untimely ends. The forensic evidence is inconclu-



sive but most probably one was killed by local crows or ravens and the other taken and eaten by a raccoon.

563 is considering writing a book about Razzle, Jack and herself: how they have contributed to and changed each others lives and psyches. We hope she will. The Chronicle wishes this rare troika good fortune and will continue to report, when informed of them, on their experiences.



THE TALK OF THE ROOST

BIBLICAL CORVID

2 Kings 17:1-7 (New International Version)

¹ Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

² Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."

⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

⁷ Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

AESOP ON CORVID BEHAVIOR

Last fall the Chronicle included a note from Boria Sax about a news article confirming that one of Aesop's fables was based on fact about corvid behavior. We provided a Web address only to the article. Here is his note explaining his early hunch about the fable and the BBC report.

A well-known fable traditionally attributed to Aesop tells of a thirsty raven that dropped stones into a pitcher until the water level had risen high enough so that he could drink. Actually, a "Fable of Aesop" was a

generic term for any anecdote, especially involving animals, in the ancient world. That particular story comes from the Natural History of Pliny the Elder. The moral usually appended is now even more famous than the tale itself – "necessity is the mother of invention."

At any rate, when I began studying animal fables, most writers assumed the tale was impossible, but I had a feeling that it was probably true. For a few decades, I have been waiting for confirmation, and now that has finally been accomplished. In a recent experiment by British scientists, a rook figured out how to reach a floating worm by dropping stones into a tube. Rebecca Morelle of BBC News reported: "Clever rooks repeat ancient fable – One of Aesop's fables may have been based on fact, scientists report."

"In the tale, written more than 2,000 years ago, a crow uses stones to raise the water level in a pitcher so it can reach the liquid to quench its thirst."

"Now a study published in Current Biology reveals that rooks, a relative of crows, do just the same when presented with a similar situation."

"The team says the study shows rooks are innovative tool-users, even though they do not use tools in the wild."

"Another paper, published in the journal PLoS One [Public Library of Science], shows that New Caledonian

crows – which like rooks, are a member of the corvid group, along with ravens, jackdaws, magpies and jays – can use three tools in succession to reach a treat.

"To investigate further, a team from the University of Cambridge and Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL) presented four captive rooks with a set-up analogous to the fable."

"The birds were shown a clear tube containing a small amount of water. Floating upon it was an out-of-reach worm. And a pile of stones was positioned nearby."

"Dr. Nathan Emery, co-author of the paper, from QMUL, said: 'The rooks have to put multiple stones in the tube

until the worm floats to the top.'

"And the four birds did just that. Two, called Cook and Fry, raised the water-level enough to grab the floating feast the very first time that they were presented with the test, while Connelly and Monroe were successful on their second attempt."

"Footage of the experiments shows the rooks first assessing the water

level by peering at the tube from above and from the side, before picking up and dropping the stones into the water."

"The birds were extremely accurate, using the exact number of stones need-

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ROOST NOTES *Rosalita & Charlie*

The Chronicle received two more accounts of crows found and cared for by humans until ready to leave -- one an injured full-sized crow and another, a fledgling.

Corvi 321 of Pittsboro, N.C., is a bird rehabilitator whose day job is working in a veterinarian hospital. She wrote a few years ago about Crowdaddy and this year wrote about Rosalita's rehabilitation..

We also received a beautifully penned letter from Mallory Pearce of Tybee Island, Ga., a calligrapher and corvi. He sent stories and sketches of Charlie, a companion crow that stayed with his family for a few years in the 1970s in California.

Rosalita's story

Having raised, rehabbed and successfully released "Crowdaddy," I was a fan of crows for life. When a co-worker called me and said someone had brought us yet another injured crow, I ... hurried to work. She was magnificent and huge -- and oh so very injured. She had somehow suffered a massive head injury -- and appeared completely paralyzed. Her eyes were full of fear. I cried -- and gently hugged her.

Both doctors on duty that day ... examined her carefully and consulted with the local wildlife expert. There was concern that she could have been injured because she was sick -- most likely West Nile virus. Her prognosis wasn't good, but they calculated doses of antibiotics and steroids, cleaned her wounds. My journey with "Rosalita" began.

She was unable to keep her balance even while sitting, so I rolled up a blanket and wrapped it around her. If I opened her beak and put food in her mouth, she was able to swallow. She kept a close eye on my cats, though they kept their distance and obviously respected her size. Within a couple of days the fear began to subside from her eyes.

Lucky that I worked for a vet hospital, so she was able to come to work with me every day. She quickly came to enjoy the car rides and seemed content to sit snuggled in her blanket on my desk. She was quite thin; so I fed her very couple hours for the first few weeks.

[It took a couple of weeks for any signs of progress -- and it happened when #321's back was turned. She had set out food for the crow on her desk but had to leave the room to help a co-worker before feeding Rosalita.]

When she returned to her, the bowl was empty. "I wondered: did she really feed herself, or did one of the hospital kitties

brave getting that close to her and polish it off?" So I filled the bowl again, stood back a few feet and watched. She immediately began eating, then I swear she smiled at me.

Over the next weeks ... her movements were jerky and awkward, but she was moving!! Before long it wasn't so easy to keep her on my desk at work or in her chair at home.

I did have a "bird room" at home where I kept songbirds that I was rehabbing -- and an occasional cottontail. The room was a permanent residence for three of the birds: two little retarded sparrows -- Chirpie and Jukebox and a large beige pigeon, Charlie Brown. The birds all flew freely in the room. There were perches in every window, baskets to sleep in and even an outdoor aviary when the weather was nice. Everyone warned me: "You can't put Rosalita in there. Crows will kill smaller birds."

But she wasn't able to walk yet, certainly couldn't fly, so I began taking her for short visits to the bird room, with me staying with her. She immediately seemed to enjoy being around fellow birds and wildlife. The wild rehabbing birds were wary of her and kept their distance, but Chirpie, Jukebox and Charlie Brown found her interesting. Soon they were sitting next to her and even sitting on her back.

I was careful not to leave her in the bird room unattended, but ... let her visit as often as I could. One evening as I was sitting next to her reading, an amazing thing happened: Chirpie and Jukebox began bringing her mouthfuls of their bird seed and leaving it in front of her, which she eagerly ate. Then even more amazing, they began to groom her, starting on her head and working down her back. (She was still unable to move well enough to groom her self.) Rosalita closed her eyes and cawed softly, as if to thank them. A wonderful friendship had broken the barriers of instinct.

Charlie Brown was a marvelous big bird, a banded pigeon who showed up on someone's porch hungry and weary. We were unable to trace his band, so he came to live in my bird room and quickly demonstrated his kind nature. He took to looking after the wild birds being rehabbed, teaching the baby birds how to eat on their own and perching with adult birds seeming to reassure them not to be afraid. It took him a bit longer than the little sparrows to interact with Rosalita, but they quickly became great pals too.

Over the next few weeks Rosalita continued to improve ever

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TALK continued

ed to raise the worm to a height where they could reach it.

"In another experiment, the rooks were presented with a similar scenario. This time they were given a combination of small and large stones.

"Overall, Dr. Emery told BBC News, the rooks opted for the larger ones, raising the worm to the top of the tube more quickly.

"He said: 'They are being as efficient as possible.'

"And when given a choice between a tube filled with water and another filled with sawdust, the birds were more

likely to opt for the liquid-filled tube.

"The researchers say their findings suggest that Aesop's ancient fable may have been based on fact.

"They said: 'In folklore, it is rarely possible to know with certainty which corvid is being referred to.

"Hence, Aesop's crow might have easily been Aesop's rook."

ROOST NOTES *continued Rosalita, Charlie*

so slowly. She had never shown any aggression towards her new bird friends and we had reached a lull in rehabbing. There were no wild birds left, only Chirpie, Jukie and Charlie Brown. She was able to walk a few short, wobbly steps, stumbling often, and still no where close to flying.

Chirpie, Jukie and Charlie Brown were agile and could move quickly. One Saturday I took a leap of faith and left Rosalita in the bird room unattended a few hours. I returned to find everyone hanging out together, carrying on various conversations, not even noticing I had entered the room.

Rosalita had become a resident of my bird room, I had hoped only temporarily. I still had visions of her flying high up in the tall trees one day, well and whole... She learned to take bird baths in Charlie Brown's bird bath - a large baking pan full of water. Although she was now able to groom herself, the little sparrows continued to assist her. Charlie Brown rarely left her side. Eventually she began to fly short, jerky flights, often falling to the floor before reaching her destination. One day she made it to Charlie Brown's big perch in the window. From that point on all four birds spent most of their days there together - one big happy family.

The warm weather arrived, so one morning I opened the window to the outdoor aviary. The sparrows were the first ones out. Charlie Brown was next, but after 15 minutes, when Rosalita hadn't joined them, returned inside. By the end of the afternoon Rosalita was sitting on the window sill, still inside but looking up at the sky and trees. She looked both excited and afraid. Charlie Brown was right beside her.

By the end of the week Rosalita had ventured out to the aviary. She was cautious and didn't move around much at first. By the end of the second week, she was flying laps around the aviary, still not very graceful, but flying. By the third week, an interesting thing began to occur. I noticed a familiar crow sitting in the branches above the aviary. It was Crowdaddy, the first crow I had rehabbed and released. He and Rosalita carried on quiet conversations. Charlie Brown chimed in often. Then other crows began to stop by and visit from time to time.

As summer was coming to a close Rosalita seemed fairly strong and healthy. The other crows came every day to visit. She now had friends on the outside too. Was she ready to go? There was only one way to find out. Early one Saturday morning I enticed the sparrows and Charlie Brown back into the bird room with a ... piece of pound cake. I closed the window, went outside and opened the aviary door. Rosalita hesitated only a moment before flying up to a lower branch. She remained there for about 30 minutes, then took off again, headed for the tops of the trees, only to sputter and tumble to the ground just a few feet away. I picked her up gently and hugged her. Not strong enough yet.

Maybe next year. Chirpie, Jukie and Charlie Brown delighted in her return....

Another year passed. A part of me didn't want to think of trying to release her again, but I knew that I had to. Though content ... she often stared for hours at the tall trees and clouds. She began to fly straight up to the aviary, banging against the screen on top. Her crow pals were diligent visitors every day.

Again I enticed Charlie Brown, Chirpie and Jukie back into the bird room early on a Saturday morning. I went into the aviary with Rosalita. She seemed to know what was about to happen. She danced back and forth on her perch, bobbing her head and cawing loudly. Her crow friends began to gather in the trees around us. I opened the aviary door and she went high up in a pine tree. Again she danced back and forth, cawing even more loudly. Her crow friends began to fly to her. The pine tree filling with beautiful black birds. She [flew] to a higher branch, but just barely... and remained on that branch the rest of the day. The other crows stayed with her. They carried on with one another, as if exchanging stories. Later in the afternoon, they began to come one at a time to the food bowls I keep on the fence posts (full of kittie crunchies, sliced hot dogs and bread). They would eat some and then carry food to Rosalita. As darkness came, I didn't worry. She was being well cared for.

It took Rosalita several weeks to venture beyond the trees nearest the aviary, slowly building her stamina and strength. Flying about in the aviary was nothing like flying free in the trees. I moved a food bowl and a water bowl to the top of the aviary. She visited this feeding station several times a day - often bringing several crow friends with her. Charlie Brown and the sparrows delighted in this....

It has been many years since Rosalita went free, but she and

Crowdaddy and all their friends still come everyday to eat and socialize on our fence. I consider it an honor to host these magnificent gatherings.

Charlie

When I lived in Santa Monica I had a pet crow (1973 to 1975). In 1973 a fledgling crow flew from his nest and landed on a porch. The residents took him in and tamed him but the landlord told them they had to get ride

of the crow. They walked the neighborhood asking "who wants this crow?" Everybody said: "go see Mallory!"

So I took the crow. I had a walk-in cage built around a window so I could let him in the house.

Charlie escaped several times but we always got him back until 1975 when he permanently escaped.

Charlie fell in love with my twin sons: James and Peter. He was attached to me but he didn't relate well to everyone, espe-



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ROOST NOTES *Crow companionship unique experience*

cially my wife Marcia. He loved for me to scratch him at the back of his head. He would point his beak downward and close his eyes.

Charlie got along fine with dogs (the prior owners had a dog) but he hated cats. We had a cat named Meouse but she was afraid of the crow and would slip out of the room whenever Charlie was there.

Once our cat was sleeping on the couch in our living room. Charlie was investigating everything on the floor, but he was walking towards the couch. I was sitting next to the cat, who was trying to ignore the crow. But the crow leapt upon the couch, walked over to the cat and whacked her on the paw with his beak. The cat bolted out of the room as fast as she could go.

Normally Charlie stayed in his large cage but often I opened the window into the cage and let him into the house. He walked around the house but we had a high ceilinged living room and he often flew in there, in circles. He collected everything and would fly to my shoulder and steal from my pocket. He would fly to his cage and stick the pilfered object in some corner of the cage. The cliché is that crows love shiny objects but he took anything. If I was eating something, he'd fly to my shoulder and poke his beak into my mouth.

Once I observed a half grown Burmese kitten "stalking" Charlie. Charlie was inside his cage on the ground watching the kitten. The kitten was outside the cage, stalking toward the crow. The kitten leapt upon the cage's screen then Charlie whacked him on its nose. The kitten retreated then stalked again and was whacked once again. This continued for 15 to 20 minutes.

Charlie had a unique reaction to any object that was black and limp. He behaves in a hostile fashion, lowering his head, spreading his wings and "growling". If I'm wearing black he doesn't react but only to a limp or inanimate black object as if it were "dead"!

I drew Charlie often but sometimes he would go after my pencil as I was drawing.

Journal entries about "Charlie"

Charlie escaped from his cage in April of 1975 and has not returned. The door was opened and there was some hamburger meat in his cage, apparently somebody brought him some food and didn't secure the doors.

There had been another crow, presumably female, that had been hanging around his cage – sometimes immediately on top of it. Charlie took up with this crow on top of the Ramada Inn across the street. I assume that it was Charlie because he would sit on the corner of the building and "caw" to me when I left my car after parking, to go to the front door. His mate would peer shyly over the top.



Drawings by Mallory Pearce, Tybee Island, Ga.

For the rest of the year we saw signs of Charlie. The boys frequently reported that Charlie would "coo" to them from a tree when they were at the High School across the street. We saw him frequently and he frequently recognized us and gave call, but he wouldn't come down.

Since that year we've seen plenty of crows around but I could never be sure which if any were Charlie but recently (August 1978) a neighbor reported a crow which "talked," i.e. babbled as Charlie used to do, to him and "buzzed" him, both in this neighborhood and in Venice.

That spring (1975) before Charlie "escaped," he was obviously in "heat"

However in the absence of another crow he turned his attention to my sons. Jamie was preferred but if he wasn't around, he'd turn his attention to Peter.

The "courtship" began with a posturing and cooing – very distinct clear "whooo" which was a slide descending to a lower pitch. It was accompanied by a bobbing down of the head, beak pointed downward, and a spreading of the wings. The courtship would end with Charlie mounting on the boy's arm and "humping" with spread wings until Charlie ejaculated. Thus we knew that Charlie was a male.

Charlie had always been fond of the boys, so I suppose that it was natural that they would become his substitute love objects. Peter and James could handle Charlie better than anybody, including me; they could even pick him up, putting their hands around his wings. Charlie did not like to have his wings restrained; he would struggle if I tried to do it.

Charlie was a unique, delightful and highly intelligent pet. His intelligence was at least as much as a dog, but possibly more. He had an uncanny ability to untie shoelaces, correctly pulling one lace at a time. As a matter of fact one of his "bad" habits was to chase after feet, whether the people wore shoes, sandals or were barefoot. When Charlie had escaped, the custodian at the High School called in response to a newspaper ad I had placed, to tell me that he had seen a crow stealing the students' lunches and chasing after their feet.

Once I performed an "intelligence" test with Charlie. I was giving Charlie some beer out of a mug with a lid. When the lid was closed, Charlie tapped on the top of the lid. Then I showed him how to open the lid by pushing on the handle with my thumb. Then Charlie immediately began pecking hard on the "handle" which opened the lid. Although he was unable to open it, he apparently had "learned" from my demonstration, the correct way to open the lid.

I'm not sad that Charlie got away and had a full life with a mate; I'm certainly glad that me and my sons had the unique experience of being friends with a crow for a couple of years.

IN MEMORIAM Noel Kavanaugh Edwards

On March 19, 2010, a fellow member of ASCAR fell from the tree of life, Noel Kavanaugh Edwards [a retired middle school science teacher]. He is survived by his beloved companion Donna and their four-legged family Boomer and Lola. The Chronicle was something that they enjoyed sharing together.

Noel was a passionate naturalist for most of his life. In 1962, he took a position as Warden at the Corkscrew Swamp Audubon Sanctuary in Naples, Fla., and he served for many years on the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Audubon Society. Later, he was instrumental in the efforts of the Redding Land Trust to acquire and preserve open space in the town of Redding. He was a former nature cinematographer under the professional name of Noel Edwards Productions, and a member of the Linnaean Society of New York. Not only will he be missed by his family and friends, but also by all the wildlife in his neck of the woods [Connecticut]. -- *Corvi 912 California roost*



The *Corvi Chronicle* is published irregularly by corvi who have an interest in or need for doing so for members of The American Society of Crows and Ravens and others. There is no subscription fee, but it is customary and seemly to send contributions to pay for production and mailing. There is a direct connection between contributions, the size of the Chronicle and its frequency of distribution. Those who do not choose to contribute will continue to receive the Chronicle and enjoy all membership privileges. However, they will no doubt suffer a loss of self-esteem and may occasionally be mocked by other corvis.

Members are reminded to make new corvi by duplicating and passing along issues of the Chronicle.

ASCAR has a home page or chat room on the Internet:

<http://www.ascaronline.org/>

ROTTEN APPLES

Bird watching and feeding are the fastest growing, biggest outdoor hobbies in the U.S. Today. An entire tourist industry has exploded recently to accommodate avian enthusiasts. If you enjoy watching birds, imagine looking out your kitchen window or driving to your favorite winter bird-watching habitat and finding 29 of your favorite songbird species lying in a conspicuous heap. Could it be coincidental that 29 of the same species mysteriously perished overnight? Would you immediately be saddened, then angry, and then want to know what happened? Would you wonder how anyone could have killed such beautiful non-game, federally protected birds?

This happened to me. I enjoy watching birds, anywhere and at any time, and I stopped by Larson's Marsh Sunday afternoon [written January 2010] about 2:3 p.m. on my way home from running errands in Ames. To my horror, I found a freshly butchered unfrozen deer carcass, haphazardly wrapped in a clear plastic drop cloth. Next to the deer was a dumped pile of 29 dead crows, many of which were still warm to my touch. My favorite songbird is the crow, and I felt an immediate sense of loss, like the loss felt by someone who loves chickadees, robins or cardinals.

My anger has partially subsided over the past few days. I will continue to be in awe of the crow for its inspirational intelligence, familial altruism, its industry and capacity to play, and for the complexity of its social structure. I have been blessed to see crows play games in the snow, jeopardize their lives to protect their altricial young, care for their injured and infirmed,



Illustration by Jim Haines

LETTERS

and mourn their dead. I will also continue to believe that, even though there are a few rotten apples in the barrel, most hunters hunt for meat, as well as sport. Although I do not hunt, I will

stand up for others' right to hunt. As for the few rotten apple hunters in the barrel, a famous author once commented, "If we were suddenly transformed into birds, very few among them would be clever enough to be crows." After all, a crow would have a greater grasp of cause-and-effect than to leave evidence at the scene of the crime. The DNR officer chuckled when I said that. -- *Corvi 295, Ames, Iowa*

DISENCHANTED

Dear ASCAR,

I have been a reader and fan for several years now and enjoyed receiving the *Corvi Chronicle*. I have recently become disenchanted with crows (not all corvi, however, for there are many other species).

There have been two recent encounters with crows that left me less than enamored of them, to say nothing of often being awakened to their raucous cawing far too early most mornings (we have lots of crows in the area). One such encounter was with a "gang" of crows that had attached an alligator lizard. I came upon the lizard as it attempted to escape the birds that had picked at it and caused it to drop part of its tail in self defense. The lizard was dazed and confused as I tried to life it on a twig and carry elsewhere. It hadn't the strength to cling to the twig, so I placed it in some grass for cover. The stubborn crows wouldn't leave they remembered that there was a potential meal awaiting them. I had to leave, knowing those birds probably

Editor..... Corvi #68

Art Directors Corvi #4, #14 #32 and #1310

The Board Known only to themselves

The Chronicle accepts articles and manuscripts of reasonable length on any topic acknowledged by The Board, news clippings and general correspondence. Unused material will be returned in good time to the authors. Commentary (insightful, indignant or otherwise) should be addressed to:

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picked it off after I left for they were tenacious. I happen to be a lizardphile, so this incident left a "bad taste in my mouth," even though I realized the incident was only nature taking its course.

The second incident has been a crow that's been dive-bombing me when I take a stroll in my neighborhood. Every time I pass under some tall pine trees, the black terror comes diving from above cawing loudly and swoops down over my head. It then crosses the street and lands in another tall pine, waits and watches until I am abreast of that tree and again dives and swoops down over my head cawing. This scenario is repeated at least four times as I make my way up the street. I have done nothing to cause this unpleasant behavior. The only possible cause I can fathom is that the bird has a nest in one of those trees it believes it's defending. What's your take?

So, for now, until proven otherwise, crows are undesirable birds and are in the dog house with me. Please remove me

LETTERS CONTINUED

from your mailing list.

Don't crow to loudly -- #7911, *Laguna Woods, Calif.*

CRESCENDO

As I walked my dog (who thinks crows are squirrels who fly) one Sunday morning while the sun rose slowly over the treetops, I was struck immobile in my tracks when a convention of crows (hundreds? thousands?) began what seemed at first to become a major treetop ruckus. They started quietly, a few at a time, and gradually reached a mighty crescendo... at the height of the crescendo came the diminuendo till all was quiet once more. One crow called out a single phrase and as suddenly as they had begun, they started up again with the same chorus. Quietly, crescendo, diminuendo, silence.

Call out. Quietly begun, crescendo, diminuendo, silence. Call again. This went on for longer than I could stay and listen. It had form, phrasing, separate parts for the participants. It seemed to me to be deliberate, as though they were presenting a concert, much like Handel or Bach, or maybe the Smashing Pumpkins. I keep hoping to hear it again, but so far....

A corvi with whom I'm well acquainted passes along the Chronicle to me. I'm fascinated by corvi and hope to roost with said Society. Please accept me to membership. Since I was born in the Celebes, might I take the name *Corvus unicolor* 47? for short, 47? I enclose a small contribution in token of my esteem.

Question: My friend who is a member of ASCAR. Is she a corvus? a corvi? a corvid? Is a group of these folks corvis? -- #Corvus unicolor47, *South Haven, Mich.*

Editor's reply: As you want it.

Diminuendo Press has released *Every Crow in the Blue Sky*, a

new collection of poetry by Tucson author, Burgess Needle. Ruth Stone, a National Book Award recipient, describes Needle's new book as exquisite. "Burgess is a poet who does what all writers wish to do," Stone says. "He translates life into poetry. The reader sees what he sees, breathes the same air, is transported to other places, is surprised and enlightened by his unique take on things, and above all, re-experiences the delicate mixture of emotions that defines what it means to be human."

The Poet's Press has released *The Raven and the Sun* by Boria Sax, who has pioneered the study of animals

BOOK Shelf

in myth and literature. The Press announced: "This collection of

poems and tales, centered around the mysterious world of crows and ravens that exists around us almost unnoticed, demonstrates the universality of the narratives in which animal wisdom plays, as he retells Eastern European and Native American crow/raven tales. The book is also interspersed with Sax's sensitive lyrics on other topics."

Palgrave MacMillan publishers has a new book by Jonathan Balcombe, *Second Nature: the Inner Lives of Animals* that includes content on ravens, magpies and scrub jays. More information about Balcombe's books is available online www.jonathanbalcombe.com

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Mug design

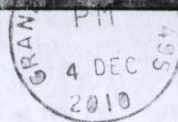
ASCAR now numbers — so think some who enjoy counting things — about 900 members. Alphabetically and in terms of interests and attitudes members range — an expression — from academics to Zoroastrians. But only the Editor and an associate minion know who and where they all are. This is in keeping with the Corvi Privacy Act that forbids those who know from talking about or to other corvis or using their names and addresses in the Chronicle without permission. The CPA is occasionally tested by purveyors of crow curios wanting access to mailing lists.

PRIVACY ACT

However, because many members have similar interests and have indicated a desire to make the acquaintance of others who share them, some thought has been given to adjusting the CPA to accommodate these wishes. Therefore anyone who would like to hear from other corvi should send along their name and address to the editor. These will be published occasionally in the Chronicle. Names are not absolutely necessary — Corvi numbers will do — but addresses are. Obviously those who wish to remain known only to the editor and her associate minion should do nothing and will continue to enjoy the protection of CPA.



Photo by Mason Rose, Patagonia, Ariz



CORVI CHRONICLE

American Society of Crows and Ravens

Kaw River Valley Roost

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